

## **CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT AND CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

Fiscal Year 2005

During FY 05, the Conservation Department and Commission continued to work together with citizen volunteers, various committees, and non-profits to protect and enhance the natural resources of the Town.

The most noteworthy event of the year was the retirement of long-time Conservation Director Peter Westover. The Town honored Pete with two celebrations attended by many colleagues, friends, supporters, and staff. Pete is credited with working collaboratively with the Conservation Commission and hundreds of volunteers to create one of the most effective land conservation programs of any town in the Commonwealth. Pete worked tirelessly for 30 years to conserve thousands of acres of land for agriculture, watershed protection and habitat for wildlife. His vision for land conservation and the extensive trail system he created in Amherst is a model for community planning.

### **Conservation Services**

Throughout the year, the Department fielded hundreds of calls from residents and visitors with questions and concerns about wetlands, rare and endangered species, wild animals, hunting, and dozens of other topics. Staff also coordinated activities in the community gardens, at Puffer's Pond, and organized farmers who rent Town agricultural land for organic farming. Conservation staff worked closely with the Planning Department, DPW, and other departments to review numerous proposals for residential and commercial development.

In addition to the Commission, the Department provided staff support to the Farm and Public Shade Tree Committees as well as numerous other unofficial groups and organizations.

### **Grants and Awards**

The Department was very fortunate to receive a \$30,000 Recreational Trails Grant from the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. In future years this grant will fund extensive improvements to the trails at the Larch Hill Conservation Area and also provide resources for a new connector to the Norwottuck Rail Trail. In November, the Department was honored to receive the **Governor's Smart Growth Leadership** award for its work in agricultural and open space protection. Amherst was the only town in western Massachusetts to be so recognized, and the only town in the state to receive a Smart Growth award for land preservation.

### **Land Conservation**

Thanks to community-wide support, CPA funds, and the help of The Kestrel Trust and Valley Land Fund, the Department was able to move forward on three important land conservation projects this year. The long-awaited Hart/Murphy APR project protected 42-acres of critical agricultural land off Northeast Street, contributing to a large block of protected land in that area. In South Amherst, the 12-acre Simmons field was acquired through a combination of local and state Self-Help funds. Finally, thanks to a very organized effort by concerned North Amherst residents, the 38-acre Dziekanowski APR effort got under way and will probably close in FY 06. This APR is most notable because the project includes the creation of a non-profit CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) operation. The Department and the Town of Amherst

continue to enjoy an excellent working relationship with the Massachusetts Departments of Agriculture (APR Program), Conservation and Recreation, and Conservation Services.

### **Land Management and Trails**

Land management goals for the year focused on replacing numerous bridges and re-opening trails that have been closed due to erosion. Four new bridges were constructed and installed while many trails received focused attention by summer crews. The Department continued to receive funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service through the WHIP (Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program) for management of our extensive open fields.

### **Energy Conservation Task Force**

During the year, the Energy Conservation Task Force was able to secure approximately \$7,500 in additional funding to keep this effort moving forward. The group focused its efforts on planning for the Renewable Energy Fair in October 2005 and the completion of the Town's first Climate Action Plan.

### **Conservation Commission and Staff**

Commission members this year were Francesca Maltese, Chair; John Gerber, Vice-Chair; Otto Stein, Nicki Robb, Ellie Manire-Gatti, Barbara Mitchell and Bruce Griffin.

The Department is staffed by Stephanie Ciccarello, Wetlands Administrator; David McKinnon, Assistant Land Manager; Bridget Davis, Office Manager; and David Ziomek, Director.

I would like thank staff and citizens for helping to make my first months as Director so productive and enjoyable. I am honored to be following Pete Westover and will work hard with the Commission to continue to protect and enhance the natural resources of Amherst.

Respectfully submitted,

David Ziomek  
Director